

Be Counted...



Garrett V.
Hillsborough, NJ 08844 USA
Age 6, April 14, 2004
(Information on back of hand)



Hands of Hope

A Nationwide Collaborative Art Project

by Nancy Speelman, CSW, CADC

What stronger way to make a statement but through the voice of the people! Tobacco use continues to be the largest cause of preventable death in the USA. It contributes to the loss of life through many tobacco-caused diseases, including deaths caused by second-hand smoke. Yet funding that was intentionally awarded to states to educate, prevent and help treat tobacco use, continues to dwindle and be used for other purposes.

Ten years ago the Addressing Tobacco Project, now known as the Tobacco Dependence Program at the UMDNJ-School of Public Health, did a banner at one of their conferences called the "Show of Hands".

Participants painted their hands and then placed them on a large canvas banner leaving a handprint. Participants then added a special note to the handprint in honor of someone who had died or was very ill from tobacco use. As a counselor who utilized art for self-expression for several years with my patients, I realized the powerful healing impact that art can have on a person. I also realized through other projects that I have collaborated on through the Visual Arts League that people from all over the world can come together to create massive pieces of art, which can have a tremendous voice. Each person working separately throughout the world, then bringing them all together to create a "masterpiece".

The Hands of Hope project was a brainstorm of mine when I was driving home from work one day and very frustrated with the major funding cuts that were being made to the Tobacco Master Settlement funds. Short of wanting to scream...I decided to put the energy into a project whereby everyday people of all ages could "speak their mind" on an issue that continues to impact so many of our lives. I remember when "AIDS" became a major threat to many people, yet the government struggled with providing adequate funding to do the necessary research and treatment. I remember rallies of people who spoke to the need. I remember viewing the AIDS quilt for the first time at the Rutgers Gymnasium...with "real people's lives, and real stories" told on panels interwoven covering the gym floor. A cemetery of peoples lives destroyed by the Aids Virus. That project eventually grew to cover the front lawn of the White House and more. I can only believe that the personalization of lives via the quilt, made a very strong impact on government dollars being spent to support Aids research.

I decided to talk to my 6-year old nephew from Hillsborough, New Jersey about my idea. I remember sitting down with Garrett and talking to him about the dangers of smoking and asking him if he would participate in this project. He gladly began to trace his hand. He had told me that just a few days before "Donnie Dinosaur" had visited his classroom and told him about the dangers of smoking. When I asked Garrett what he wanted to write on his hand artwork, his first response was "Stop Smoking Dad". His next response was "Stop Smoking World". Garrett's father was a smoker

and Garrett was very worried about him. He was already learning in school about the dangers of smoking, yet he would come home and witness his dad smoking. I can only imagine how scary that was for a child who idolized his dad. When Garrett's dad saw his artwork, his dad was taken a back by the fact that Garrett was so attuned to how his smoking worried him. "Carmine", Garrett's Dad, quit smoking shortly after this and has not smoked for almost a year now.

The "Hands of Hope" project continues to collect hands from across the nation, young and old, making clear statements as to the continued need for tobacco prevention, education and treatment.



Cumberland County Technical Education Center
STRIVES students and their Hands of Hope.

Through the ongoing growth of this project, it is my hope that the numbers and stories told through the hands will speak for themselves.

The ultimate intent of this project is to advocate for the continuation of tobacco related services, without lobbying, but through the voice of the people telling stories in honor of their loved ones whose lives have been impacted by tobacco use. Each hand representing the heartfelt devastation tobacco dependence

caused to the individual and/or their families. This collaborative art project began in the Spring of 2004 and over 200+ hands were first exhibited a National Tobacco Conference of the UMDNJ, SPH, Tobacco Dependence Program on May 28 at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick, NJ. As of January 2005, we currently have 5000 hands from all over the country.

Information regarding this collaborative art project continues to be sent to various organizations to pass onto their mailing list inviting them to participate in the project and "BE COUNTED, through HANDS of HOPE". This project allows participants to speak through their art and represent how tobacco use continues to affect their life and those they love or have loved. We want YOU to know that the message is "YOUR HAND ARTWORK WILL MATTER!" It will be joined with others across America in a collage of hands...linking together messages, from youth through adults.

Your name will be added to a list of contributors of the project. This list will be kept in a data-base tracking ages, states, etc. Contributors will be kept abreast of the project via the www.tobaccoprogram.org website, tracking the numbers of hands, as well as where it will be exhibited throughout the United States at other tobacco/health/art related events. In addition the website will provide photos of past exhibits or feature some hands. It is my goal to reach 10,000 hands by May, 2005 and have a list of organizations throughout the country co-sponsoring this project.

Volunteers will be needed to help input data, collect hands and set up displays throughout the country. If you or your organization are interested in participating or co-sponsoring this project, please feel free to contact me.

Visit our [website](#) for instructions on the Hands of Hope project.